

GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO ONLINE HOTEL REVIEWS

How to access and respond to reviews on TripAdvisor, OTAs, social media and more.

We share our best review response guidelines and tips for crafting professional responses to positive and negative hotel reviews online.



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The Importance of Online Reviews



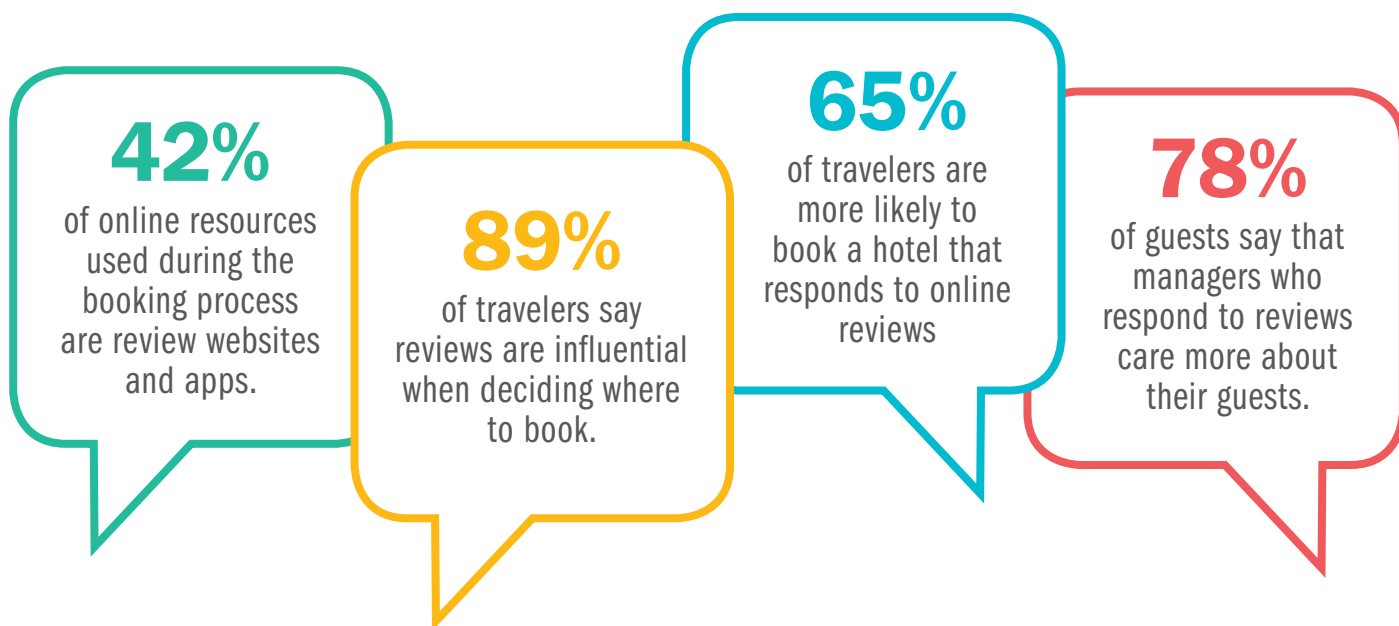
Online reviews act as the word of mouth for hotels today. Not only do review websites provide travelers a platform to share their experiences, resulting in more transparency and accountability for hotels, but they also allow hoteliers to engage and show their character to future guests.

Hoteliers know that a traveler’s buying decision is influenced by many factors online. In fact, the average traveler visits anywhere from four to 38 websites before booking. During the booking process, travel review websites and apps account for up to 42% of online sources used, and 89% of travelers say reviews are influential when deciding where to book.

However, simply receiving reviews is not enough. 65% of travelers are more likely to book a hotel that responds to online reviews. Why? 78% of guests say that managers who respond to reviews care more about their guests. Travelers today are looking for an experience, not just a place to sleep, and travelers believe a hotelier who responds to concerns and praise will likely also provide better service during their stay.

In This Guide

In this guide, we will go over best practices for responding to comments and reviews left online, information on how to claim your online listings, and how reviews vary between OTAs, social media, and other review platforms. Plus, we’ll give you an inside look into how Travel Media Group helps hotels manage and respond to online reviews.



Guidelines for Responding to Online Reviews

It's true that responding to online reviews will help improve your relationship with the reviewer, which could result in a return visit. However, online reviews and responses ultimately benefit future travelers browsing review websites.

There are a few guidelines to follow when it comes to managing your online reputation:

- ★ Respond to every review, on every website
- ★ Be respectful, professional, and positive
- ★ Address every topic the reviewer spoke to
- ★ Talk to staff to get their side of the story
- ★ Be willing to apologize and provide a solution

Some review websites allow you to privately message the guest, while others do not allow further communication past the initial review and your response. If an issue requires more information to understand the situation, be sure to note in your response that you will be reaching out to the guest directly to resolve the issue. If you do not have their contact information, provide a way for the reviewer to get in touch with you directly.

Whose Job is it to Respond to Reviews?

Although much has changed in the travel industry, sometimes hotels can be slow to adapt to the changing online landscape. Much like social media posting, responding to reviews sometimes falls to whoever seems to have time. However, we highly suggest that responses are composed by someone with excellent spelling and grammar skills who has the authority to address concerns and make changes. In addition, it's important that the person responding does not use a defensive or emotional tone, or blame the reviewer.



Responding to Negative Reviews

A response to a negative review should always:

1. Thank the reviewer for their time
2. Highlight positives and address negatives
3. Discuss changes and steps you will take

In situations where more details are needed to fix a problem, ask that the reviewer emails you directly with more information. Some review platforms, like Yelp, allow you to message the reviewer privately. If you are going to do this, be sure to also publicly respond acknowledging the review and stating that you will be sending a private message so that those reading the review will know that you are handling the situation. Here is an example of a response to a negative review that follows our guidelines:

“Staff needs to be trained in customer service” ★★

They always seem to have a attitude and don't know how to work the computer. the rooms were nice no issue there just the customer service was not good. They need to have more friendly staff at the front desk.

We appreciate your feedback and concerns regarding your recent stay. While we are delighted that you enjoyed your room, we are disappointed to learn that you did not have a pleasant customer service experience. We will be sharing your comments with our staff, so that we can make the necessary adjustments for future guests. Thank you again for your feedback and we hope that you will give us another opportunity to provide you the customer service and stay you expected.

Responding to Positive Reviews

A response to a positive review should always:

1. Thank the reviewer for their time
2. Reference specific positives
3. Welcome the guest to visit again

If possible, also personalize the review based on details you remember of their stay or by their name. While you don't need to brag or comment on every positive point they mentioned, we would suggest that you provide more than just a simple "thank you." In the case that a positive review also had some negatives, be sure to address these aspects and how you can improve for their next stay.

"Great Experience" ★★★★★

Looking for a smoke free place to stay, this is it. We came in without a reservation and was quickly accommodated. The rooms were clean and spacious. The staff was friendly and accommodating staff. Not to mention the wonderful, free, hot breakfast. Thank You Best Western. We'll see you again soon.

Sandra,

We are already excited for the next opportunity we get to accommodate you! Thank you for trusting the Best Western brand to deliver the comfort, service and convenience you were seeking. Our team will be pleased to welcome back a familiar face during your next visit. Once again, thank you for the compliments and we are glad you enjoyed our hot breakfast selection!

Accessing Review Platforms

Next, we'll guide you through how to access the management portals for the top 9 websites that include review capabilities: TripAdvisor, Expedia, Travelocity, Hotels.com, Orbitz, Booking.com, Yelp, Google, and Facebook.

Claim Your Business

Claiming your TripAdvisor listing is fairly easy: simply go to www.tripadvisor.com/Owners and type your hotel and city name to search for your hotel. You'll need to register with TripAdvisor and follow the steps to verify your identity.

Once you have your TripAdvisor page claimed, you can update property and contact information, upload photos, write a unique description, add specials, and (most importantly) post management responses to reviews.

TripAdvisor Reviews

When travelers leave TripAdvisor reviews, they begin by rating on a scale of 1 (Terrible) to 5 (Excellent). Reviewers must provide a title and write at least 200 characters, plus select what sort of trip they took (business, family, couples) and when they traveled. TripAdvisor also uses reviewers as a resource to gather more information about the property and will ask additional questions like "Does this hotel have laundry service? Do kids stay free?"

The reviewer can also rate the service, value, and location on a range of 1 to 5, report on the noise level, and give tips to other travelers to help them choose the best room. Finally, travelers can add photos that will be shared publicly on the TripAdvisor hotel listing.

Responding to Reviews

Once you have claimed your listing, you can respond to any review on your hotel's page. We would advise writing a response in a word processor before copying it into TripAdvisor. First, this will allow you to keep the review open in a separate window to reference and touch on every aspect of the review. Second, there is no way to edit TripAdvisor responses and you can only have one response per review. It is a good idea to draft a response in a word processor to check the grammar and, if necessary, send it to others for review and approval. When you're sure you're ready to post, you can copy the response into TripAdvisor and publish it.

All Management Responses are reviewed by TripAdvisor before publishing, and it can take up to a few business days for your response to publish. If there is an issue that needs to be handled immediately, write a response stating that you're working on contacting the person and then give the guest a call. You can provide contact information in your response, but remember that this will be public, so we advise against using your personal email address.

Claim Your Business

Because Expedia owns Travelocity, Hotels.com, and Orbitz, the process of claiming your hotel listing and responding to reviews is the same for all four websites.

For hotels already using these OTAs, you can sign in to Expedia PartnerCentral at www.expediapartnercentral.com. If you aren't already listing your hotel on the websites but would like to, you can visit www.joinexpedia.com. Once logged in, you can add photos, update your rates and inventory, and respond to guest reviews.

Expedia Reviews

After a guest stays in a hotel they booked on an Expedia-owned website, they will receive an email requesting a review. All reviewers on Expedia-owned websites are confirmed guests, meaning that people who did not book their hotel stay through these websites can not review your hotel on the websites. Reviewers rate the hotel on a scale of 1 to 5 on room cleanliness, service & staff, room comfort, and hotel condition. In addition to their review text, reviewers can also add pros, cons, and notes about the hotel location.

Responding to Reviews

On Expedia, Travelocity, Hotels.com and Orbitz, hoteliers can simply provide a response and a nickname instead of their real name, such as Hotel Management. Because the OTA acts as an intermediary, they will not release a guest's personal information to a hotel. If a guest has a problem, such as stating that they are waiting for a refund, then the OTA support team may contact the hotel to resolve the issue. The websites will not approve your response if it contains personal contact information or if you suggest that the guest books directly next time.



Claim Your Business

Property managers and owners can log in or sign up to Booking.com at admin.booking.com. Booking.com lists more than just hotels – worldwide, travelers also find villas, chalets, holiday homes, and seaside villas. Signing up just involves some details about your property, uploading photos, and accepting the commission terms.

Booking.com Reviews

Each review on Booking.com has an overall review score. When guests fill out a review, they rate your hotel on a scale of 2.5 to 10 for staff, service and facilities, cleanliness of the room, comfort, value for money, location, and Wi-Fi (if available). These scores are then averaged to provide the average review score. Your hotel will receive an overall score when you have at least 5 reviews.

Reviews only remain on a hotel page for 24 months. After this point, they are archived. Reviews scores from archived reviews are not factored into the hotel's overall score, which is calculated based on reviews within the last two years. Hotels with 10 or more reviews and an average score of 8 and above will receive a Guest Review Award, including a certificate and window sticker to show off your commitment to great guest service.

As with other OTAs, reviews can only be left on Booking.com by guests who booked their reservation on the website.

Responding to Reviews

You can't edit Booking.com reviews, so be sure to give your response another read-through before you submit. When viewing hotel reviews, the first 119 characters of a management response will show up before hiding the rest under a "Continue Reading" link, so be sure that the first sentence is positive, professional, and impactful. If you need to discuss any negatives from their review, address these beginning in your third sentence.

Claim Your Business

With a free Yelp account, you can upload photos, edit your business details, create deals, and respond to reviews. You can visit biz.yelp.com to claim your Yelp Business Page. You can also download a Yelp for Business Owners mobile app to be able to update your business listing at any time.

Yelp Reviews

Unlike with reviews on OTAs, anyone can leave a review on Yelp. Reviewers can either just leave a 1 to 5 star review (from “Eek! Methinks not” to “Woohoo! As good as it gets”) or they can also add comments. Reviewers have the ability to edit or remove reviews.

Business owners can report a review to Yelp if they think it’s a conflict of interest (such as a review being posted by someone who works at a competitor’s business) or if inappropriate contact is included (like threats, harassment, or hate speech). However, Yelp tends to side with the community of reviewers, so it’s best to try to rectify situations directly with customers and only report reviews as a last resort.

Responding to Reviews

Yelp provides the ability to both respond publicly to reviews and to direct message customers that leave reviews. In order to respond to reviews, you must have an approved profile photo including a clear picture of the business owner, not a logo or storefront photo.

When responding to reviews on Yelp, it’s generally best to respond to negative reviews publicly. Unlike OTAs, Yelp doesn’t mind if you offer amends to get people back into your business. However, beware of the precedent this sets for others, so direct message the person to offer specifics.

You can also use direct messaging to respond to positive reviews where you don’t have anything else to add. People like to skim through Yelp reviews and pull out helpful information, so they don’t want to have this broken up by a lot of simple “Thanks!” responses. Direct messaging positive reviewers is also helpful as you can save time and reuse the same “Thanks for visiting, come back soon!” message for everyone.

Claim Your Business

Google reviews appear in search results, on Google+ pages, and in Google Maps. You'll need to log in to a Google account and then visit business.google.com. Click on the red circle, then click Add a Location. Alternatively, you can open the Google Maps app on mobile and find your business. Under the business information, you can click Claim this business to begin the process.

In addition to adding photos of your business, you can also add a virtual tour to your Google business listing and edit holiday hours for the listing. Google also provides advanced insights, including how many people searched for you and the number of customers who clicked on your listing to visit your website, request directions, and call your business.

Google Reviews

Anyone with a Google account can review a business on Google Maps. Reviewers are asked to provide a 1 to 5 star rating, a description of their experience, and have the option to add a photo. While reviewers can edit or delete their reviews, this functionality is a little difficult to access so it is not as likely that someone would come back to edit their review as it is on Yelp.

Because anyone can leave a review, it is possible to report a Google review for being defamatory or false. However, if the reviewer didn't leave enough specific information, it is very difficult to have a review removed for containing false information.

Responding to Reviews

To respond to Google reviews, simply visit business.google.com. In the Reviews section, click Manage reviews. Here, you can view and reply to reviews you have received. Google encourages business owners to leave succinct responses that are helpful and nice and don't try to win an argument or provide a long backstory. Simply state necessary information such as changes to help bad experiences, thank the reviewer, and post.

Crafting the Best Online Review Responses

Reviews can be found in search engine results pages, so it is important to be mindful of the phrases that will become keywords when you respond. Here are some basic rules:

1. Do not explicitly reference negative points made.

- ✗ We're sorry your room had bed bugs during your visit. We just completed the treatment and the infestation has been taken care of.
- ✓ We're sorry you had a bad experience the night you stayed. We have taken all the steps necessary to treat the problem and prevent it from happening again.

2. Refer to good reviews as “reviews” and bad reviews as “feedback”.

Travelers rely on reviews to make travel decisions, so it's pretty common for planners to search for “[hotel name] reviews.” When they do, you would much rather come up in search results as saying “thanks for your review!” to someone giving glowing praise than to someone complaining about their stay.

3. Be unique, genuine, and specific.

While it's true that travelers think hotels that respond to reviews care more, they'll likewise look down on a hotel giving the same cookie-cutter response to every single review. You can create a document with ideas of how to open and close reviews so that when you're in a rut, you can pull from ready-made responses.

Open positive reviews with...

*We appreciate your feedback/
comments/kind words...
Thank you taking the time to share...
We are thrilled to hear you enjoyed...*

Open negative reviews with...

*Your constructive feedback is appreciated...
Thank you for notifying us of your
recent experience...
We appreciate that you took the
time to share...*

As you can see, there are a lot of places online where people are talking about your hotel. Responding to online reviews requires time, professionalism, and expertise. That's why we developed unique reputation management solutions to help hoteliers track, influence, and maintain any hotel's online reputation.

Reputation Management

The Travel Media Group Reputation Management solution features our reputation dashboard, which allows hotels to manage and respond to online reviews all in one place. You can receive email notifications and text messages when each guest leaves a new review and track your position compared to your top competitors in your market. As part of our Reputation Influence program, we also leverage an email campaign to encourage guests to leave reviews and receive helpful internal feedback.

Respond & Resolve

Don't have time to respond to reviews? Travel Media Group can help. We've hired and trained experienced Review Analysts to write insightful responses to your online reviews. Our analysts will write the review responses, you can approve them, and responses will post directly to the review websites on your behalf. We also help with critical review resolutions and provide sentiment analysis so you can learn review trends at a glance. Ask about our unlimited review response solution to get expert responses to reviews on every website discussed in this guide.

When used together, our reputation management solutions have been proven to increase ratings and city rankings, helping to improve visibility in search. All of our solutions include ongoing consultation and training with a dedicated support specialist to make sure that you're getting the most out of your online hotel marketing solutions.

Ready to Get Started?

Request a free consultation and demo of our reputation management solutions by filling out the form at trvl.media/reviewhelp. We'll match you with a hospitality media specialist who will help you take control of your online reputation.

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